5 Quantifying the Running Record

Box 1

COUNT THE RUNNING WORDS
150

Box 1: Count the words in the text, omitting titles.
Box 2: Count the errors, and enter the Error Ratio.
Box 3: Use the conversion table to find the Accuracy Rate.
Box 4: Work out the Self-correction Ratio.

Here is one way to think about self-corrections. There were 15 errors in 150 running words of text and the 5 self-corrections represent an extra 5 potential errors. Altogether there were 20 chances to make self-corrections so there were 5 self-corrections in 20 chances to self-correct.

Box 2

RATIO OF ERRORS TO RUNNING WORDS
$\frac{\text{Errors}}{\text{Running Words}}$
$\frac{15}{150}$
1 : 10
One in ten

The four boxes provide the calculations corresponding to the steps outlined above. The conversion table provides quick access to accuracy rates.

Box 3

ACCURACY RATE
$100 - \frac{E}{RW} \times \frac{100}{1}$
$100 - \frac{15}{150} \times \frac{100}{1}$
= 90%

Conversion Table

Error Ratio	Percent Accuracy	
1:200	99.5	
1:100	99	
1:50	98	
1:35	97	
1:25	96	
1:20	95	Good opportunities for teachers to observe children's processing of texts.
1:17	94	
1:14	93	
1:12.5	92	
1:11.75	91	
1:10	90	
1:9	89	
1:8	87.5	
1:7	85.5	
1:6	83	The reader tends to lose the support of the meaning of the text.
1:5	80	
1:4	75	
1:3	66	
1:2	50	

Box 4

SELF-CORRECTION RATIO
$\frac{SC}{E + SC}$
$\frac{5}{15 + 5}$
1 : 4
One in four

Turn back to page 15 and score that Running Record. Put one count in the error column for every error and one count in the self-correction column for every self-correction. Total each column and work out the Error Ratio, the Accuracy Rate, and the Self-correction Ratio.

7 Interpreting the Running Record

There is another level of analysis that will help teachers to work out what information in the text the reader is attending to. To do this you must give closer attention to analysing the error and self-correction behaviours. The analysis takes very little time but it can uncover some important things about the reading process.

Readers of text appear to make decisions about the quality of the message they are getting. One kind of theory would say the child is recalling words and attacking words; another kind of theory would say that the child is using information of various kinds to make a choice among possible responses. He is trying to get the best fit with the limited knowledge he has. It is this last kind of theory that guides the following discussion.

Look at the errors in the record

It is important to analyse every error and not to look at errors selectively. Ask yourself, 'What led the child to do (or say) that?' For every error ask yourself at least three questions:

M — Did the meaning or the messages of the text influence the error? Perhaps the reader brought a different meaning to the author's text.

S — Did the structure (syntax) of the sentence up to the error influence the response?

V — Did visual information from the print influence any part of the error?

(See page 24 for explanation of the V category.)

When an error is made write the letters MSV in the error column. Circle the letters if the child's error showed that the child could have used meaning, structure or visual information (which will include letter form and/or letter-sound relationships) from the sentence so far.

Scan the record to answer two other questions

1 Did the child's oral language produce the error, with no influence from the print?

2 Was the child clearly getting some phonemic information from the printed letters?
What makes you suspect this?

These two questions cannot be used in scoring a record because teachers cannot agree upon their interpretations, and the information is therefore unreliable. However, if the reader sometimes responds as if he was 'just talking', or if specific phonemic information is, without question, used, teachers can note these things in their records but not include them in the formal summation of text reading.

Now look at self-corrections

Often readers make errors and without any prompting, work on the text in some way and self-correct the errors. It is as if they had a feeling that something was not quite right. It is now easy to record in the self-correction column whether the *extra* information the reader added to make the self-correction was meaning, structure or visual information. This is usually rather interesting, especially when we look at what happens across the entire record. A single error could have been unusual for the reader.

Consider the pattern of responses

Now look at the overall pattern of the responses you have circled so that you can bring your analysis of errors and self-corrections together into a written summary. This statement about the sources of information used and neglected will be useful to guide subsequent teaching.

Record the statement at the top of the Running Record next to the appropriate level of the text.

Some common faults

1 Analysis of meaning, structure and visual information is of little value unless it is done carefully.

2 Consider the sentence only up to the error (not the unread text).

3 The total number of M, S or V circles are merely a guide to what is being neglected, what is made a priority, and when the reader can combine different kinds of processing.

Example of a Running Record taken on the Running Record Sheet

RUNNING RECORD SHEET

Name: Sam Date: 4·2·00 D. of B.: 1·5·94 Age: 5 yrs 9 mths

School: Westleigh Recorder C.B.

Text Titles	Errors / Running Words	Error Ratio	Accuracy Rate	Self-correction Ratio
Easy		1:	%	1:
Instructional Dogs (Highgate/P.M.)(seen)	3/34	1: 11·3	90 %	1: 2
Hard		1:	%	1:

Directional movement ✓

Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections

Information used or neglected [Meaning (M), Structure or Syntax (S), Visual (V)]

Easy

Instructional Meaning and structure are used predominantly for substitutions with some attention to visual information. Repetition with visual information led to three self-corrections.

Hard

Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)

Meaning & structure cross-checked with visual information dogs little / like small

Page	Title: Dogs	E	SC	Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections: Information used E MSV	SC MSV
2	S- / Some | T ✓ ✓ ✓	1		M S (V)	
3	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓				
4	✓ ✓ ✓ scary / growly	1		(M)(S) V	
5	✓ ✓ dogs | R | SC / like ✓ ✓		1	(M)(S) V	M S (V)
6	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓				
7	✓ ✓ ✓ little | R | SC / Small		1	(M)(S) V	M S (V)
8	✓ ✓ dog is | R | SC / dog's ✓ ✓		1	(M)(S)(V)	M (S)(V)
	✓ ✓ biggest | R | A / cuddliest | | | T ✓ ✓	1		(M)(S) V	
		3	3	5 5 2	1 3

Read slowly with some intonation.

8 Understanding the Reading Process

When teachers ask themselves, 'What does my record tell me?', they bring their own beliefs about literacy (their personal theory of literacy/learning) and their background of professional experience into the interpretation. Interpretations of Running Records are heavily weighted with the theoretical view the teacher already holds. My interpretations fit with my theory that progress depends on an increasing complexity in the processing which enables the reader to read more difficult texts. I think of the child working with several different types of knowledge lying there in the print (which I call 'different kinds of information').

To explain the error consider the behaviour up to the point of the error.

To explain a self-correction consider what might have led the child to spontaneously correct the error.

If teachers bring different theories to these records they may ask quite different questions of the data and their interpretations may seem different. However, the behaviour record would still look the same because it comes from extensive research into what young readers do as they read text.

For example, examine the attention given in these analyses to V, standing for the visual information in print. During acquisition the visual information becomes intricately linked to phonemic information (the sounds of speech or phonology) so that children could probably be said to 'hear' a letter or cluster of letters they are looking at. Theorists tell us that visual information also links directly to a vocabulary of known words (spelling patterns or orthography). So, theoretically, the symbol V in the analysis of Running Records stands for the stimulus information on the page of print irrespective of whether the processing is through a phonological system or a visual system. This is a point at which teachers might differ in their 'understanding' of what a reader was doing.

What if a reliable behaviour record does not support expectations? Unable to deny that the actual behaviour did occur we probably need to adjust any assumptions that are not supported by recorded data. So it is important that we have reliable records.

Running Records are useful if we remember the following things.

- Record error behaviour in full because the information is needed when interpreting the records.
- Poor observation will reduce the number of errors and inflate the accuracy score.
- Reliability drops as accuracy levels fall because there is more error to be recorded.
- Observation of poor readers is difficult and requires rigorous training to reach agreement on scoring because of the complexity of the error behaviour.
- The most reliable records would be obtained by scoring an observation immediately following its manual recording but for classroom teachers that is not usually possible.

In older readers look for different signs of progress

If Running Records are used with older readers there should be a special reason for taking them. They are excellent for recording the early phases of literacy acquisition but before long what the reader is doing becomes too fast and too sophisticated for teachers to observe in real time. Literacy processing shifts gradually towards this.

As the reader learns to process more information more quickly, behaviours change and new things can be noted. Errors occur even though the reader clearly used meaning, structure and visual information to get to a response (*strong* for *sturdy*). It is an important 'sign of progress' when errors do contain several kinds of correct information even though the final decision is not quite correct.

Another change occurs when more proficient readers utter only the word beginning and then give the whole word. These are examples:

wu/would pl/play Pe/Peter bu/but

A similar kind of thing happens when the older reader corrects what might have been an error before giving the whole word, as in:

m.../parents gar.../ground d.../tied

Sometimes there is more repetition as the older reader tries to regroup words in phrases.

In older readers self-correction occurs less frequently. In theory we suppose that it has 'gone underground' and the reader is correcting errors before saying them. If the teacher introduces a more challenging text the process of self-correcting may reappear. Even adults reading aloud can be heard to self-correct.